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The End of Decisive Military Force: Are the Principles of War still Relevant?

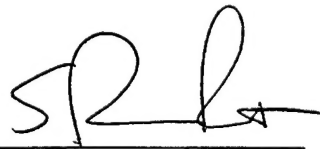
By

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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The End of Decisive Military Force: Are the Principles of War Still Relevant?

Globalization is an unstoppable force of change that is greatly affecting human civilization and existence. Advances in technology, world population distribution trends, and competition for finite resources are but a few of the forces that are making our world smaller, more interdependent, and in greater cultural contact. One military consequence of these trends is that US political leaders and operational military commanders can expect coalition warfare to characterize most future military conflicts. Additionally, coalition restraints may prevent operational commanders from applying decisive military force as is currently articulated in joint doctrine and is implicit in the longstanding US principles of war. Specifically, the application of concentrated, decisive, lethal force in the form of airpower, despite its proven effectiveness, may be unlikely as an initial course of action in future conflicts. Divergent national political objectives within future coalitions may simply not allow an initial application of overwhelming combat power until previous gradual and incremental military measures have been tried and failed. The recent NATO experience in Operation Allied Force was an apparent victory for airpower but a victory in which airpower was applied gradually and incrementally, a manner inconsistent with existing doctrine. Idealistic US joint doctrine which refers to the use of operational art to guide the application of overwhelming combat power, while valuable as a philosophical foundation of unrestrained warfare, may have less utility in alliance and coalition application. This paper will review existing doctrine and the principles of war, consider military coercion theories, and review instructive historical examples of airpower application (Vietnam, Desert Storm). Finally, selected principles of war will be analyzed as they were applied in Operation Allied Force to determine if the principles of war upon which our doctrine is founded remain relevant.

Caution must be exercised to distinguish between criticism of the policy at the national strategic level and criticism of the military strategy. Clausewitz reminds us of the distinction;

"...when people talk, as they often do, about harmful political influence on the management of war, they are not really saying what they mean. Their quarrel should be with the policy itself, not with its influence. If the policy is right – that is, successful – any intentional effect it has on the conduct of the war can only be to the good. If it has the opposite effect, the policy itself is wrong."¹

If doctrine is to remain useful to future alliance/coalition leaders, it must contain practical guidance and concepts. If the operational principles put forth by doctrine are becoming less relevant due to the realities of alliance and coalition policy, then we have two options; 1) update or expand doctrine to recognize the operational challenges of planning and directing combined military operations in coalition *and* provide operational commanders with useful mechanisms/alternatives to optimize coalition efficacy, or 2) remain true to doctrinal principles we believe are immutable and enthusiastically endorse and explain these principles to our political masters so national and coalition policies may be effectively developed. A third and more realistic option is to advance a combination of both.

The objectives of Operation Allied Force included the cessation of ethnic cleansing and the removal of Federal Republic of Yugoslavia forces from Kosovo. The US decided that if NATO was to remain relevant and viable as a future regional stabilizing organization, the maintenance of alliance unity was paramount. Therefore, any proposed course of action not agreeable to the 19 alliance members was not an acceptable choice. The acceptance of the political limitations imposed in Operation Allied Force divided US military leaders. A critical position for this paper is that these political limitations, more likely in non-Article V

¹ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 81.

NATO operations in which an alliance member's sovereignty is not at stake, must be accepted. Military leaders are required to plan and execute operations within these political constraints and, perhaps more importantly, they are charged with an obligation to inform the national and alliance political leadership of the consequences of such political impositions. Joint US warfighting doctrine recognizes such limitations yet offers little guidance and, in fact, advances principles of war which may have outlived their application given the realities of recent coalition experiences.

History is replete with examples of political guidance and limitation on military action. During World War II preparations for Operation Overlord, the allied invasion of Normandy, the strategic bombing forces planned for the interdiction of key French and Belgian rail centers. Voicing concern for civilian casualties, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill insisted the War Cabinet approve targets one by one.² The philosophical confrontations between Prussian Chancellor Otto von Bismarck and Chief of the General Staff Helmuth von Moltke regarding military responsibilities during the German wars of unification serve as a classic example of strained civil-military relations. During the Vietnam War, weekly target review meetings were held in the White House under the Johnson administration. Varying degrees of political oversight of military activities must be expected; military strategy must remain subordinate to national policy. The challenge is to best prepare our operational military leaders to operate under such conditions. Our doctrine is one of the best tools to provide such operational guidance. However, doctrine must be periodically updated as warfare changes if it is to remain relevant.

Joint Publication 1-02, the Department of Defense Dictionary, defines doctrine as the fundamental principles by which the military forces or elements thereof guide their actions in

support of national objectives. Considered authoritative, joint doctrine is critical in unifying our planning thoughts and executed actions. It is not surprising to find little useful guidance in alliance doctrine since even US joint doctrine still contains large gaps where draft publications remain in development (e.g. JP 2-01.1, Joint Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for Intelligence Support to Targeting). US doctrine states "Commanders of forces operating as part of a multinational (alliance or coalition) military command should follow multinational doctrine and procedures ratified by the United States."³ The reality is that alliance doctrine is vague and lacks details.

Alliance doctrine is overly broad. It defines general warfare missions and describes the obvious characteristics of military power (e.g. airpower's advantages of speed, range, and flexibility).⁴ What are missing are useful coordination and integration methods or procedures for planning and execution. Alliance doctrine does contain specific references to coalition challenges, including political limitations. NATO Tactical Air doctrine states;

"Political considerations may affect AI operations at all levels of conflict. Restrictions may be imposed on the areas which may be overflowed; in some situations NATO forces may be compelled to concede sanctuary areas for some parts of the enemy's military potential. Restrictions may also be imposed on the kind of targets that may be attacked, to prevent an undesirable degree of escalation."⁵

Joint US doctrine likewise recognizes the political considerations involved in multinational operations;

"The MNFC must be aware of the differences in the political constraints and capabilities of the forces of various nations, and consider them when assigning missions and conducting operations. The commander should be prepared to spend the majority of time working political rather than purely military issues. The commander's role as diplomat should not be underestimated. Commanders will routinely work directly with political authorities in the

² Russell Weigly, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1981), 62.

³ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Doctrine for Joint Operations* (Joint Pub 3-0), (Washington, D.C., February 1, 1995) i.

⁴ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *NATO Tactical Air Doctrine* (NATO ATP-33 (B)), (Brussels: NATO Permanent Joint Headquarters, 1986) 8-1.

⁵ NATO ATP-33 (B), 5-2.

region. Even within their own command, political limitations and constraints on the employment of the forces will greatly influence daily operations."⁶

While US joint doctrine for multinational operations warns of potential political limitations it subsequently describes the capability of air power to "strike at the heart of the adversary to accomplish national, multinational, and theater-strategic level objectives."⁷ In the diplomatic arena, a political compromise as the result of a gradual, incremental, negotiated approach may be the objective. In the violent military arena, doctrine suggests the application of overwhelming force will lead to the quickest settlement. The problem occurs when the diplomatically common incremental approach is used to prescribe initial military actions. In such cases, the initial military course of action in a conflict may be a limited action intended to represent a signal or initial position. This is in conflict with doctrine's endorsement of "striking at the heart" of the adversary.

The US principles of war date back to 1921 when Army Training Regulation 10-5 listed nine principles nearly identical to today's; Objective, Offensive, Mass, Economy of Force, Maneuver, Unity of Command, Security, Surprise, and Simplicity.⁸ Clausewitz cautioned about the thoughtless application of theory to warfare;

"...no prescriptive formulation universal enough to deserve the name of law can be applied to the constant change and diversity of the phenomena of war"⁹

However, he believed principles that framed one's thinking were acceptable.

"...principles and rules are intended to provide a thinking man with a frame of reference for the movements he has been trained to carry out, rather than to serve as a guide which at the moment of action lays down precisely the path he must take."¹⁰

⁶ Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Doctrine for Multinational Operations (Joint Pub 3-16), (Washington, D.C.: September 2, 1997) III-1.

⁷ Joint Pub 3-16, IV-8.

⁸ Joint Pub 3-0, Appendix A.

⁹ Clausewitz, 152.

¹⁰ Clausewitz, 141.

The principles of war, while acceptable tools, must be periodically scrutinized for relevance to the changing nature of war. Doctrine founded upon the classic principles of war, while plainly useful for guiding large, exposed conventional opponents, may now be in need of revision given the realities of coalition warfare. It is in this context that four existing principles of war are examined with regard to coalition warfare. Interestingly, NATO doctrine specifies 10 principles of war; Selection and Maintenance of the Aim (objective), Flexibility, Concentrations of Force, Economy of Effort, Unity of Effort, Offensive Action, Security, Surprise, Morale, And Resource Management.¹¹ Additionally, principles of military operations other than war (MOOTW) are also specified in US joint doctrine; objective, unity of effort, security, restraint, perseverance, and legitimacy.¹² An optimized list of the principles of war *in coalition* might provide more useful doctrinal guidance.

Unity of command is the most fundamental principle of warfare.¹³ The purpose of unity of command is to ensure unity of effort under one responsible commander with the requisite authority to direct all forces employed in pursuit of a common purpose.¹⁴ When unity of command is not possible as in some multinational or interagency operations, unity of effort is essential. The command organization is crucial to achieving unity of command and with the frequent insistence upon parallel command structures, unity of effort remains a challenge. The alleged 19 member "war by committee" in Operation Allied Force¹⁵ certainly calls into question unity of effort. This simply may not be achievable in loose alliances or coalitions.

¹¹ NATO ATP-33 (B), 2-4.

¹² Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Doctrine for Military Operations Other than War (Joint Pub 3-07), (Washington, D.C.: June 16, 1995) II-6.

¹³ Robert Riscassi, "Principles for Coalition Warfare", Joint Forces Quarterly, Summer 1993, 66.

¹⁴ Joint Pub 3-0, A-2.

¹⁵ Operation Allied Force: An Initial Doctrinal Assessment, 4.

The principle of **objective** is applied to direct all action toward the achievement of a clearly defined goal. If the objectives can be clearly articulated and agreed upon, a coalition then only has to agree upon the means of achieving the objectives. While at first consideration such agreement seems possible, it is perhaps the most divisive of issues facing coalitions. The operational art of applying military force to influence enemy behavior is an area worthy of great study for if definitive theories can be developed, warfare will be revolutionized. This can only remain a goal for the complete and total understanding of human psychology remains a mystery.

The principle of **offensive** is founded upon seizing and retaining the initiative. While airpower is inherently offensive, it may be unduly constrained when sanctions are granted, potential military targets are restricted, or limits are applied to the magnitude of the effort. Airpower is not unique in this regard; political restrictions, which also limit initiative when applying land or maritime power, are equally damaging to military effectiveness. Coalitions in which the objective is to influence enemy behavior through aerial punishment (e.g. Operation Allied Force) may keep the initiative but it is up to the enemy to decide when to capitulate. The enemy's will to resist has been typically underestimated by US planners. The resolve of the Vietcong in making daily repairs to the Ho Chi Minh trail after it was routinely bombed surprised US military planners. Kosovo was another example of unexpected resolve. Initial assessments of Serbian resistance that predicted capitulation in terms of days or weeks soon grew to months.

The principle of **mass** emphasizes the importance of the concentration of combat power at a decisive time and place. The archaic notion of massed forces must be discarded in favor of the broadened concept of massed effects. Technology has enabled massed effects

through dispersed forces yet coalitions are challenged by the growing disparity in technological sophistication and by the political unwillingness to apply overwhelming, decisive force through such massed effects. Perhaps what is needed is a broadened concept of massed effects. Lethal operational fires certainly constitute one form of massed effects but coalitions may instead find that agreement in the massing of non-lethal effects using coordinated economic, psychological, and informational measures is easier to achieve. It may be more difficult for a coalition to coordinate such diverse non-lethal activities than to plan a destructive bombing campaign but the former may be more palatable.

Coercion

Clausewitz defines war on the first page of "On War" as "an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will."¹⁶ This simple sounding idea rapidly branches into countless theories of how best to compel our enemy to do our will. For our purposes here we will briefly consider theories of military coercion.

"Coercion means to change the behavior of a state by manipulating costs and benefits. Both coercion and deterrence focus on influencing the adversary's calculus for decision making, but deterrence seeks to maintain the status quo by discouraging an opponent from changing its behavior. By contrast, coercion seeks to force the opponent to *alter* its behavior."¹⁷

The focus will be on air power as the primary vehicle of force application. We must keep the context of our analysis in view; we are considering the utility of our doctrine and the utility of existing principles of war in conducting coalition warfare. Airpower is the primary instrument under consideration because of its exclusive use in Operation Allied Force. Certainly, the principles of war apply to all forms of military power, including land and maritime power. The early discounting of ground forces in Kosovo was an egregious

¹⁶ Clausewitz, 75.

¹⁷ Robert A. Pape, "Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion", (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996) 4.

strategic error. In Operation Allied Force, lessons learned from the failure to apply certain principles of war could be applied to ground as well as air forces.

Political scientists have identified four broad categories of aerial coercion; punishment, risk, denial, and decapitation.¹⁸ The categories may have utility in general analysis however one must remain skeptical about the forced placement of military historical examples into one of these supposed all-inclusive categories. Certainly no one approach will work in every circumstance.¹⁹ In fact, Operation Allied Force contained elements of several categories of aerial coercion.

Punishment campaigns seek to raise the societal costs of continued resistance to levels that overwhelm the target state's territorial interests, causing it to concede to the coercer's demands.²⁰ Central to this concept is the targeting of civilians, either directly through attacks on cities or indirectly through the loss of critical life supporting infrastructures. A total naval blockade, while not an aerial coercion technique, is a form of punishment. Similarly, the isolation of Berlin after World War II and no-fly zone enforcement over Iraq could be considered forms of punishment. Italian airpower theorist Giulio Douhet predicted that just two days of uninterrupted bombing with high explosive, incendiary, and poison gas bombs would send a city's population "fleeing to the open countryside to escape this terror from the air."²¹ Other examples of punishment include World War II German bombing of London, the British bombing of German cities, the US firebombing of Dresden, and the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. One element of the punishment strategy considers the possibility of bombing causing a popular revolt

¹⁸ Pape, 57.

¹⁹ Pape, 19.

²⁰ Pape, 18.

against the current government. While today the targeting of non-combatants is forbidden by the law of armed conflict, the impetus given to popular uprising by the hardships induced by bombing damage to infrastructure would seem to constitute a legitimate part of the calculus. Dropping bridges across the Danube River and taking down the electrical power grid in Belgrade were actions that had elements of the punishment strategy.

The risk strategy pioneered by Thomas Schelling can involve a similar target set as the punishment theory but the essential difference is in the timing. Also referred to as "gradualism" or "gradual escalation", Schelling's "compellence" is founded upon a gradually increasing attack intensity accompanied by a clear message that the attacks will be stopped upon compliance with the coercer's demands.²²

"The ideal compellent action would be one that, once initiated, causes minimal harm if compliance is forthcoming and great harm if compliance is not forthcoming, is consistent with the time schedule of feasible compliance, is beyond recall once initiated, and cannot be stopped by the party that started it but *automatically* stops upon compliance, with all this fully understood by the adversary."²³

The Kosovo conflict was characteristically "gradual" as the strike sortie rate started slowly and built up in intensity as the 78 day air war progressed. An essential element of gradualism concerns the psychological conditioning of the adversary. George Quester, a professor of military strategy who has taught at the National War College, emphasizes the psychological aspect of expectancy.²⁴ Gradualism creates an incremental expectation of destructiveness and therefore hardens the adversary's resolve. Overwhelming force creates shock and exceeds expectations and therefore avoids any gradual enemy hardening.

²¹ Giulio Douhet, The Command of the Air, trans. Dino Ferrari (1942: new imprint, Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1983) 58.

²² Pape, 19.

²³ Thomas C. Schelling, "Arms and Influence" (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1968), 89.

²⁴ Martin L. Fracker, "Psychological Effects of Aerial Bombardment", Air Power Journal, 1993, 2.

A denial strategy constitutes a more classical targeting of the opponent's military forces. These strategies aim to deny the opponent hope of achieving his military objectives. The current no-fly zones over Iraq are a form of denial since they prevent Iraqi air force activity. Elements of denial include air missions such as interdiction, which attempt to isolate enemy forces by attacking transportation nodes, POL facilities, and ammunition plants. These interdiction targets are similar to those identified in Colonel John Warden's second and third rings of his concentric five-ring metaphor of the enemy as a system of systems. In that model, the center ring represents the leadership, the second ring represents organic essentials (electricity, oil, etc.), and the third ring represents infrastructure.²⁵ The Allied Force air campaign that targeted the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia's Third Army in Kosovo was following a denial strategy. Denial and punishment strategies often involve similar target sets; elements of infrastructure have military as well as civil utility. In Operation Allied Force, Belgrade's electrical power grid and the bridges across the Danube River were common targets of both a punishment and denial strategy.

Lastly, the decapitation theory contains elements of punishment and denial. The genesis of the decapitation theory was in Colonel Warden's representation of the enemy state as a system of systems. Listed outwardly the five concentric rings represent the leadership, organic essentials, infrastructure, population, and the fielded military.²⁶ As a punishment strategy, decapitation aims to overcome the government's ability to exert control and, as a denial strategy, decapitation aims to inflict "strategic paralysis" upon the national decision-makers.²⁷ The decapitation theory proposes that the center ring, the state's key leadership, is

²⁵ Warden, "Concepts in Airpower for the Campaign Planner" ed. Albert U. Mitchum (Maxwell, AL: Air Command and Staff College, 1993) 11.

²⁶ Warden, 12.

²⁷ Warden, 80.

the strategic center of gravity. The leadership and its key communication facilities are not the only targets, just the most effective ones.

"The command structure... is the only element of the enemy - whether a civilian at the seat of government or a general directing a fleet - that can make concessions. In fact, wars through history have been fought to change (or change the mind of) the command structure - to overthrow the prince literally or figuratively or to induce the command structure to make concessions. Capturing or killing the state's leader has frequently been decisive. In modern times, however, it has been more difficult - but not impossible - to capture or kill the command element. At the same time, command communications have been more important than ever, and these are vulnerable to attack. When command communications suffer extreme damage...the leadership has great difficulty directing war efforts. In the case of an unpopular regime, the lack of communications not only inhibits the bolstering of national morale but also facilitates rebellion on the part of dissident elements.²⁸

The labeling of a bombing campaign with one of the aerial coercion theories is not important; all circumstances are unique and require a combination of effects to achieve the desired results. Additionally, the effects of airpower cannot be considered in isolation without considering the combined effects of all forms of national power. However, a historical review indicates the reduced effectiveness of military power when it is applied gradually.

The Vietnam War

The Vietnam War provides valuable insights with regard to validating air power theories through the failures of Operation Rolling Thunder and the successes of Operation Linebacker II.

Rolling Thunder, the American bombing campaign from 1965 to 1968 was a classic Schelling risk strategy of gradual and incremental application of airpower. Air operations were constrained by President Johnson due to concern for the level of domestic support for indiscriminate bombing of the north and for fear of Chinese intervention, and were thus

applied incrementally with frequent halts. This was no concentration of massed effects as doctrine currently specifies. The strategy was a failure; North Vietnamese morale was unaffected, supplies continued to flow south, and the halts provided a chance for the north to rectify deficiencies in air defenses.²⁹ The costs were enormous; nearly 1000 aircraft shot down, 800 aviators killed or captured, and damages to North Vietnam estimated at \$600 million while the value of US aircraft lost neared \$6 billion.³⁰

Operation Linebacker II demonstrated the value of airpower when properly employed. In late 1972 when President Nixon was committed to a US withdrawal from Vietnam, he needed a mechanism to force the Vietnamese to negotiations in Paris. Nixon lifted the previously imposed bombing restraints, including the prohibition of targeting Hanoi and Haiphong, and eliminated bombing pauses in a denial strategy. Despite weaknesses in unity of command (USAF, naval, and strategic B-52 forces were all under separate commands), the strategy succeeded. Without knowing for sure, one can conclude that the North Vietnamese, considering the pending US withdrawal, made a classic cost/benefit choice to negotiate for fear of losing too much military/industrial capability to continue the war against the south. The experience validated the principles of objective and mass and provided organizational change incentives regarding unity of command.

The Gulf War

With the frustrations of Vietnam still in the minds of senior officers during the Gulf War, the gradualist approach was soundly rejected and a diverse US led coalition designed and executed a superior plan. President Bush allowed the senior military leaders to develop a

²⁸ John A Warden III, "Employing Air Power in the Twenty-first Century", in *The Future of Air power in the Aftermath of the Gulf War*, ed. Richard H. Schultz Jr. and Robert L. Pfaltzgraff Jr. (Maxwell Air force Base, AL.: Air University Press, 1992), 65.

²⁹ Guenter Lewy, "America in Vietnam", (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978) 374.

minimally constrained air plan. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Colin Powell, was determined to avoid a gradual and incremental strategy. The air campaign was concentrated, precise, and decisive; an overwhelming application of combat power consistent in every way with the principles of objective, mass, and even unity of command despite a parallel command structure. The air objective was clear.

"...we will initially attack into the Iraqi homeland using airpower to decapitate his leadership, command and control, and eliminate his ability to reinforce Iraq's forces in Kuwait and southern Iraq. We will gain air superiority so that we can subsequently attack Iraqi ground forces with air power to reduce his combat power and destroy reinforcing units."³¹

The 43 day air campaign averaged over 1500 sorties per day and dropped over 98,000 tons of ordnance, 6,520 tons that were precision guided munitions.³² The "Instant Thunder" concept plan was designed to attack Iraq's centers of gravity (strategic and operational), paralyze Iraqi leadership, degrade their military capabilities, and reduce their will to fight. It was planned for 700 attack sorties per day on 84 strategic targets.³³ Operation Desert Storm was clearly designed around the principle of decisive force. Fortunately, the political leadership of the coalition allowed the build-up and application of initial overwhelming force, in the air during the first 43 days, and on the ground in the first 100 hours. It succeeded in degrading much of the Iraqi command structure, reducing military production, neutralizing the Iraqi Air Force, and significantly degrading the overall combat effectiveness of the Iraqi army in Kuwait.³⁴ This contrasted with the incremental, attrition warfare which was characteristic of

³⁰ Phillip Meilinger, "Gradual Escalation", Armed Forces Journal, October 1999, 18.

³¹ 25 August CINCENT briefing by General Schwarzkopf, Department of Defense, Conduct of the Persian Gulf War (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, 1992) 66.

³² G. D. Bakshi, "Yugoslavia: Air Strikes Test of the Air War Doctrine", Strategic Analysis, August 1999.

³³ Conduct of the Persian Gulf War, 122.

³⁴ Conduct of the Persian Gulf War, 92.

Rolling Thunder. A gradual strategy finds no basis in our principles of war or current doctrine. Unfortunately, it was to return in Kosovo.

The War in Kosovo

The success of Operation Allied Force was directly attributable to the professionalism of the US and coalition military personnel. What remains unclear is what national and coalition policy lessons have been drawn from the experience, what expectations have been established by the US public regarding the apparent invincibility of US forces, what proposed doctrinal changes have been strengthened, and what perceptions have been left with future political leaders about grand military strategies. The Department of Defense after-action report from Operation Allied Force listed alliance command and control, contingency planning, and “the alliance’s political-military interfaces” as just a few of the areas that need attention.³⁵

Using certain principles of war as a framework, the alliance’s experience in Operation Allied Force will be analyzed to determine the degree to which the principles were applied.

Unity of Command. One of the greatest achievements of Allied Force was in keeping the 19 NATO members unified throughout the campaign. The appointment of a Combined Forces Air Component Commander (CFACC) and the implementation of a Combined Targeting Coordination Board (CTCB) are two mechanisms to direct and coordinate air efforts. Statements from LT GEN Short, the CFACC, suggest a strong philosophical opposition to the initial targets of main effort, the Third Army, but acknowledged that he was able to adequately conduct his job.

“...there were indeed differences in philosophy on how to conduct the air campaign. I want you to understand that those differences at no time prevented me from doing my job.”³⁶

³⁵ “DOD Releases Kosovo After-action Report”, *Seapower*, December 1999, 15.

³⁶ Michael C. Short, US Congress, Hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee, October 21, 1999.

Despite differences between US military leadership and between alliance partners, NATO held together. The loss to a fractured alliance of legitimacy and credibility can be more significant than the physical loss of combat power. Despite what must have been enormously frustrating to NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe, SACEUR, General Wesley Clark, regarding restrictions imposed by various alliance members' national command authorities, NATO recognized the value of legitimacy to a cohesive alliance and kept outwardly unified. Legitimacy must be considered a fundamental principle of coalition warfare.

Objective. The objectives of Operation Allied Force were enumerated and detailed in somewhat different terms within the United States and NATO.³⁷ President Clinton detailed three strategic objectives for Operation Allied Force;

1. To demonstrate the seriousness of NATO's opposition to aggression and its support of peace.
2. To deter President Milosevic from continuing escalating his attacks on helpless civilians by imposing a price for those attacks.
3. If necessary, to damage Serbia's capacity to wage war against Kosovo in the future and seriously diminish its military capabilities.³⁸

The CINC must translate these broad strategic objectives into actionable military objectives. The luxury of clearly defined military objectives enjoyed in Desert Storm was not to be in Kosovo. It would be difficult to develop a more broad objective than "to demonstrate resolve". The value of the principle of objective remains paramount. Current doctrine needs no additional amplification in this area; clearly defined objectives remain a must.

Joint doctrine advises that "the joint campaign is oriented on the enemy's strategic and operational centers of gravity".³⁹ General Clark, also US CINCEUR, translated the

³⁷ President Clinton listed three, Secretary of Defense Cohen listed two, and NATO listed five. USAF Doctrine Center, Operation Allied Force: An Initial Doctrinal Assessment, (Maxwell AFB, AL, 1999) 6.

national strategic guidance into a concept plan that focused on his perception of the operational center of gravity, the Third Army's fielded forces in Kosovo. LT GEN Short clearly believed a better target set was the targets valued greatly by Serbian President Milosevic, mainly the strategic targets in Belgrade (bridges, headquarters buildings, command and control facilities, and the electrical power grid). LT GEN Short believed these targets constituted the strategic center of gravity. Broadly stated, non-specific national objectives do not assist the commander in developing unambiguous, clearly identified military targets. "Demonstrating seriousness" has strong risk strategy overtones while "imposing a price" infers a punishment strategy. More clearly specified objectives might have eliminated the philosophical differences in targeting between the CINC and the CFACC. However, initial alliance political hesitations might have made a US military agreement on targeting moot.

Offensive. The principle of offensive dictates acquiring and maintaining the initiative. Operation Allied Force surrendered the initiative early when ground forces were removed as an option. The Yugoslavian forces were able to disperse and dig in during the bombing since no ground attack was forthcoming. Unless President Milosevic truthfully confesses his logic, we cannot determine if it was the aerial attrition of his army, the renewed threat of a ground campaign, the effects of economic sanctions, or the perceived isolation from Russia that caused the removal of Serbian forces from Kosovo. What is known is that the principle of offensive was not optimally utilized to maintain the initiative when ground forces were eliminated from early consideration.

³⁸ "NATO Forces Strike Serbia", Air Force News, March 24, 1999.

³⁹ Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Doctrine (Joint Pub 1), (Washington, D.C.: January 10, 1995) IV-2.

Mass. The most violated principle of war in Kosovo. Unlike Desert Storm, where a decisive and overwhelming attack was coordinated, Allied Force saw a regrettable return to gradualism and incrementalism. In roughly the first half of Allied Force, NATO conducted 80 missions per day; in the second half the number increased to 600 missions per day. It took NATO 12 days to fly the same number of combat missions that were flown in the first 12 hours of Desert Storm.⁴⁰ Allied Force sorties totaled 38,000 in 78 days; Desert Storm 110,000 in 43 days.⁴¹ While dislodging the Iraqi army from Kuwait was a similar military objective to ejecting the Third Army from Kosovo, the manner in which airpower was incrementally applied was very different.

A return to gradualism and a rejection of the notion of initial application of decisive force presents a direct challenge to an implicit element of the American Way of War; military conflicts should be planned and conducted to end quickly. The Vietnam War and Desert Storm occupy opposite ends of the spectrum; one a lengthy war of attrition for which public support was lost, the other a concentrated build-up of overwhelming superiority followed by a short period of decisive combat endorsed by the US public. The dilution of combat power application over time inherently leads to longer conflicts, a condition intolerable to the US public except in defense of the most vital interests. NATO opted to trade decisive force for alliance unity and therefore assumed the risks of an extended military campaign.

“Limited military action in the short term can extend the overall length and intensity of war, increase casualties, and create conditions which make it more difficult to reach a stable outcome and lasting peace...NATO was not prepared to deal with these realities when it

⁴⁰ Operation Allied Force: An Initial Doctrinal Assessment, 7.

⁴¹ Anthony H. Cordesman, The Lessons and Non-lessons of the Air and Missile War in Kosovo, (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1999) 4.

negotiated with the Serbs, or began the bombing campaign. It was not prepared to use decisive force in either political or military terms.”⁴²

Additionally, the return to gradualism in Operation Allied Force eliminated control of the operational factor of time. Controlling the tempo of operations can be a useful tool of operational commanders. By rapidly employing decisive force the enemy’s decision-making capabilities can be overwhelmed. During Desert Storm, coalition forces greatly degraded the Iraqi decision making cycle in the first hours after the start of the air offensive in January 1991.⁴³ Clearly, Serbian President Milosevic felt no threat from the tempo of operations in the initial phases of Operation Allied Force. Doctrine that promotes a rapid tempo of operations may have limited utility in an overly politically constrained alliance that is not capable of supporting rapidly evolving operations. The utility of network centric warfare, the US Navy’s future warfighting vision, in politically burdened coalitions must be questioned.

Conclusions

Drawing the wrong conclusions from Kosovo must be avoided. The historical case studies in this paper have focused on airpower. Airpower’s inherent strengths have dominated the recent conflicts. It is, however, a dangerous proposition to suggest air power alone can win future conflicts. The dislodging effect of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) which forced the movement and massing of Yugoslavian armored forces was a complimentary and perhaps essential element of airpower’s effectiveness. The depth of US military strength still derives from the synergistic blend of air, land, and naval forces as well as the increasingly critical effects of space and informational power.

To remain useful in application, the principles of war may need to be conceptually modified to fit our rapidly changing environment. Perhaps, just as MOOTW has a custom

⁴² Cordesman, 16.

tailored list of the principles of war, so should war in coalition. The growing disparity in capabilities between the US and our allies may support such consideration.

Additionally, legitimacy, a MOOTW principle, appears to have achieved primary consideration in recent conflicts (e.g. NATO alliance unity) and could be considered a universal principle of war.

Perhaps a broader conceptual application of certain principles is necessary to keep them relevant. For example, thinking of the concentration of mass as the concentration of massed effects including non-lethal effects, economic effects, psychological effects, or informational effects would give a whole new meaning to the application of decisive force.

An alternative view might be that the principles of war are, in fact, unassailable and the US should strike out on its own when coalition/alliance restrictions become unacceptably burdensome. The detailed study of enemy systems coupled with the future precision engagement capabilities directed by JV 2010 should create new levels of US striking effectiveness. If operational concepts based on such capabilities (e.g. effects based targeting) are unlikely to gain coalition acceptance, perhaps the US will be forced to act unilaterally. Such a decision would have monumental strategic implications. The more likely reality is that the US will continue to remain an engaged and cooperative ally. If this is the case, doctrinal guidance to reconcile the theory of overwhelming force application with the incremental pitfalls resident in delicate coalitions is needed.

The political direction, including restrictions and limitations, of military power is an enduring truth in our country. While certainly frustrated at times, US military leaders have faithfully recognized and performed their missions under the mandated circumstances. Current trends and recent experiences suggest the future will place operational leaders in

⁴³ Milan Vego, On Operational Art (Fourth Draft), (Newport, RI: US Naval War College, September 1999) 79.

complicated, multinational military organizational structures. While the tenets of operational art and the principles of war have been historically validated, doctrine that solely calls for the application of overwhelming force, without equal discussion of coalition considerations that may limit such a course of action, may be ill-preparing future commanders. Anthony Cordesman captures the dilemma caused by advancing technologies and growing alliance/coalition limitations when coupled with dated doctrine that calls for the application of overwhelmingly decisive force.

“Gradual escalation tends to fail, or to make escalation the norm, where shock and decisive force can sometimes produce far more prompt results. There are no rules to history, but if force is worth using at all, the early use of decisive force is generally best. The practical problem for NATO, the US, and the West, is whether it is possible for the West to deal with these facts in ways that permit the use of decisive force, or whether the kinds of limitations NATO faced during the air and missile campaign in Kosovo are part of a pattern of growing political limitations in the ways in which Western democracies wage war...One of the ironies of the advances in modern air and missile power and modern military technology of all kinds is that it may be impossible to use it to achieve “shock and awe” in all but the most drastic contingencies, and that real-world military plans and doctrine must be based on “limits and restraint”⁴⁴

The collective principles of war which espouse the application of decisive and overwhelming military force appear less useful with each subsequent coalition/alliance involvement of US military forces. The enduring value of these principles seems to be trending more towards Clausewitz' dialectic of war in the abstract than war in reality.

⁴⁴ Cordesman, 16.

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